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¶1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

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Civil Society

¶2. Opposition Adopts Parliamentary Elections Guidelines

The Political Council (PC) of the United Democratic Forces (UDF) on July 13 agreed on principles of the coalition's participation in the 2008 parliamentary elections, particularly that the coalition would field only one candidate per district. The PC set September 1 as the start of the election campaign, which would include pursuing changes to the Electoral Code and educating citizens about infringements of their voter rights. Campaign managers will work in a joint coordinating center under the PC and will present a list of candidates by September 15. Opposition members who are actively involved in political campaigns and have previous experience in elections will be eligible to be a candidate. The PC will present a final list by January 1, 2008 and determine key electoral districts. Former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich and his For Freedom movement (FF) announced on July 13 that they would not nominate candidates. Malady Front (MF) agreed to participate, but Milinkevich noted that the MF would fight for "procedure" and not "for power."

¶3. Daughters Visit Kozulin

Daughters of jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, Olga and Yuliya Kozulina, spent three days at the Vitba prison with their father. Olga and Yuliya arrived at the prison on July 13 for what they called "humiliating" clearance procedures. Guards reportedly checked all food, books, clothes, and personal belongings. Olga maintained that her father remained optimistic, but was feeling fatigued, drowsy, and unable to exercise due to back pain. She said he had not recovered from his 53-day hunger strike. Olga added that prison authorities strongly discourage inmates from socializing with Kozulin and censored his mail. Both daughters confirmed rumors that a prison guard attempted to hit Kozulin in January, but the incident had not been recorded and no other cases of assaults followed.

14. Polish Journalist Banned Entry to Belarus

Polish reporter for the Polish newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" Wacław Radziwinowicz was not allowed to transit Belarus on July 16 on his way to Moscow. Belarusian border guards ordered Radziwinowicz off the train, held him for five hours at passport control, and then boarded him on a train back to Poland. Authorities did not issue "denied entry" stamps, but advised Radziwinowicz to reach Moscow by air or transiting through Ukraine. Radziwinowicz previously worked in Minsk until the GOB denied him press accreditation in September 2006. He reportedly had the required Belarusian transit visa.

15. Union of Left-Wing Parties to Join UDF

On July 16, Acting Chair of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party Gramada (BSDP-Gramada) Anatoly Levkovich announced that the Union of Left-Wing Parties (ULP) would be part of the UDF. During a second ULP founding convention on July 13, the BSDP-Gramada, the Party of Communists of Belarus (PCB), Women's Party 'Nadzeya', and the unregistered Party of Labor adopted the ULP charter and formed a Central Council to be co-chaired by member-parties' leaders. Levkovich denied allegations that the ULP was created as an alternative to the UDF, calling it a "rapprochement between

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pro-democratic forces" to facilitate coordination in the UDF work. He noted member-parties would soon file a second ULP registration application to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) after the MOJ denied the coalition registration earlier this year.

16. Activists Demonstrate Over Monastery Reconstruction

Over 100 youth activists on July 16 demonstrated at the site of the former Bernardine monastery in downtown Minsk to protest its conversion into a hotel and entertainment center. Demonstrators lit candles and prayed for the return of the building to the Roman Catholic St. Joseph community before singing an alternative anthem and dispersing. Security forces observed the demonstration, but did not make any arrests.

17. Milinkevich Briefly Detained

Police on July 17 detained FF leader Milinkevich in Ostrovets, near the Lithuanian border. Milinkevich's press office claimed Milinkevich arrived in Ostrovets to recruit activists for his movement, but the police approached him after his meeting with local residents. According to police, Milinkevich had to go to the police station to explain his stay in a border area, which is restricted territory without proper permission. He was released an hour and a half later without any charges filed against him.

18. Opposition Activists Briefly Detained and Fined

Police on July 18 detained FF members Evgeny Prokurat and Ilya Shimansky in Beryoza for three hours before releasing them. The activists were distributing leaflets on the benefits of a better relationship with the European Union (EU) if democratic reforms are made in Belarus. Police confiscated the leaflets and made the activists explain their activities in writing. On July 19, a district judge fined another FF activist Yaroslav Bernikovich in Glubokoye USD 145 for participating in an unauthorized demonstration and distributing leaflets on July 15.

¶9. GOB Registers Minsk Communist Party

The PCB's Yelena Skrygan informed the media on July 18 that the party's Minsk city office was granted official registration. The PCB applied for office re-registration last year following its annulment in August 2006. Skrygan maintained that the party "did everything possible" to prevent the GOB from finding any errors in the registration paperwork. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) also endorsed the PCB's charter adopted at the party's 12th convention in May.

¶10. MF Continues Solidarity Drive on Foot

MF members on July 19 began their "solidarity drive" to show support for jailed activists and celebrate the imprisoned MF leader Dmitry Dashkevich's July 20 birthday. MF activists planned to tour cities where MF members are facing GOB harassment. However, police stopped the four carpooling vehicles outside of Minsk and, citing the drivers' "suspicious" driving licenses, escorted all the activists to a local police station. Passengers were released two hours later, but the drivers and vehicles were detained, forcing the MF activists to continue the solidarity drive on foot.

¶11. Activist Forced to Join the Army

BSDP-Gramada member Marian Fedoruk of Brest was summoned to the local military registration and enlistment office on July 19 to learn that he would immediately be drafted to the Belarusian army. Fedoruk has a diagnosed health condition that prevents him from serving in the military. Military officers held the activist for three hours and could not provide any reasonable explanation for their orders. Fedoruk and his party believe the draft call is GOB harassment for his political activities.

Domestic Economy

¶12. Lukashenko Beefs Up Anti-Corruption Efforts

Lukashenko on July 16 signed edict 330 establishing special units in the General Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Interior, and Belarusian KGB to fight corruption and organized crime. Such units were originally established in 1997 in compliance with the anti-corruption law and presidential decree on anti-terrorism. The president expects the edict to make anti-corruption efforts more efficient.

International Trade

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¶13. Belarus-China Economic Relations on The Rise

Following his July 16 meeting with China's Finance Minister, Prime Minister Sergey Sidorsky announced that Belarus and China would carry out 35 joint projects in 2007-2010, including the upgrading of Minsk power and heating plants with the help of a Chinese USD 46 million loan. Belarus will also purchase Chinese textile, concrete, and food processing equipment. In 2006, Belarus-China trade exceeded USD 1 billion. Belarus' major exports to China include potash fertilizers, trucks, integrated circuits/microchips, raw hides, machinery, metal, and chemical products. China exports mainly consumer goods to Belarus.

¶14. Quote of the Week

While receiving the visiting Chinese Finance Minister Jin Renging on July 16, Lukashenko demonstrated his master knowledge of the Chinese psyche:

"We [Belarus and China] were looking narrowly at each other. The leadership of China was especially doing this, for a long time guided by traditional Chinese wisdom."

Stewart